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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a definition of the characteristics necessary for a quality reading program in a Right to Read local education agency. Against these criteria the Right to Read Advisory Council of the local education agency may evaluate its current program. Through a comparison of current practices with what should be, existing strengths may be identified, weaknesses noted, and voids detected. The statements indicative of an excellent reading program include: coordination of all of the administrative facets of the reading program; continuous progress organization of the reading curriculum to preclude gaps and omissions; systematic record keeping for all pupils; complete testing; commitment by staff to pupil learning; accommodation of the varying moments of readiness, the varying rates of learning, and the special needs and problems of all children; accommodation of the instructional reading level of all children; accommodation of racial, cultural, and sexual differences; adjustment of curriculum in other subject areas; ongoing in-service education; preparation in reading for all personnel involved with students; inclusion of trained volunteer reading aides; provision for an adult basic education component; defined curricular provision for the gifted; and incorporation of a quality preschool component. (WR)

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State of Minnesota Right to Read Program

STATE OF MINNESOTA CRITERIA OF EXCELLENCE IN READING PROGRAMING

November 20, 1972

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Preface

It has been stated that one of the two basic dimensions of the Minnesota Plan is that of making direct technical assistance available to each public school district and to each private and parochial school administrative unit for a sustained period of time in order that a total reading program may be built which meets certain generally accepted criteria of excellence.

The State of Minnesota Criteria of Excellence in Reading Programing provides a definition as to what it is believed should come to characterize a quality reading program in a Right to Read LEA. It is against these criteria that the Right to Read Advisory Council of the local education agency will evaluate its current program. By comparing what currently is against what should be, existing strengths may be identified, weaknesses noted, and voids detected. From such a process, needs will be established and priorities ordered. It is believed that the State of Minnesota Criteria of Excellence in Reading Programing provides the objective to which all Right to Read LEAs will aspire to achieve.

Although it is not identified as a separate criterion, the fact must be emphasized that a pervasive concern of all individuals responsible for the teaching of reading and the building and conduct of the reading program be that of manifesting a genuine sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of youngsters and a commitment to help develop within our youth a belief in their worth and accomplishment that is conducive to the building of esteem for themselves.

The State of Minnesota Criteria of Excellence in Reading Programing will constitute one dimension of the evaluation model for Right to Read in Minnesota. The extent to which an LEA is judged to have realized the defined criteria would appear to be a measure of the success attributable to Right to Read participation.

These criteria were approved by the membership of the State of Minnesota Right to Read Advisory Council on November 20, 1972.

The State of Minnesota Right to Read Advisory Council

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Mr. Lee Antell, Minnesota Indian Education Council
Ms. Harriet Bartelle, Member-at-large
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State of Minnesota Criteria of Excellence in Reading Programing

1. There is coordination of all of the administrative facets of the reading program.

There may be several sources from which a single child receives instruction in reading: the parents and all classroom and supportive teachers at the elementary and post elementary levels. In addition the child may attend a public school at the kindergarten level, a non-public school during the regular academic year, and a public school again for summer school instruction.

In many instances these various sources seemingly are working at cross purposes with one another with the child caught in the middle of this tug-of-war.

The principle of coordination applied to organization suggests that these various instructional sources should be united in order that the new instructional source can somehow relate to, capitalize on, and build upon what it is that has occurred previously rather than representing a "starting over again."

2. There is continuous progress organization of the reading curriculum so as to preclude gaps and omissions.

The typical reading curriculum is of such a magnitude, possesses such quantity, as to be considered appropriate for children of average ability making average progress to master coincidental with their completion of grade six. This means that one-third to one-fourth of the pupil population may be expected to possess the potential to enable them to master the curriculum prior to the end of their sixth grade in school. Conversely, it was never intended that the one-third to one-fourth of our pupil population considered less than average in terms of when they were ready to begin to learn how to read and whose rate of learning is less than normal should be expected to master all of the learnings specified as crucial in a reading curriculum by the end of grade six.

The implication is that not all children at a grade level should be expected to be able to master that grade's curriculum concurrent with the end of the school year. Some have the potential to succeed with more than that grade level's curriculum while some children are not able to master the total grade level curriculum by the end of the school year. This fact has implication in terms of where instruction should begin in the curriculum at the beginning of the succeeding school year.

Continuous progress organization proposes that the instruction should be begun at the onset of a new school year from the point to which the child's level of mastery will allow him to begin. This means that nothing will be omitted in the curriculum because the curriculum, or what it is that the children are taught, is not determined by the child's grade in school, but rather, by the child's point of progress in the curriculum.

3. There is a record keeping system for individual pupils.

In order for a continuous progress type of organization to function effectively it must be possible for the teacher at the beginning of each new administrative period to readily ascertain the achievement level of each pupil in the reading curriculum. This demand can best be met through the establishment and use of a reading record that is cumulative in nature, and that is used to record the achievement of each pupil in the area of reading.

4. There is a complete testing system which includes the use of criterion-referenced measures.

If instruction consists of the teacher doing what needs to be done in order that his/her charges come to master the learnings which constitute the curriculum, it would seemingly follow that the essence of instruction is that curriculum. Curriculum is the "what". It is what we want children to come to learn.

The testing program defined by the LEA should therefore include the use of instruments which will measure whether those elements of the curriculum which are regarded as essential and which have thus been taught have been learned. Criterion-referenced instruments, because of their content validity, will yield to teachers the kind of information that will allow them to reteach those curricular elements taught previously but which are found to not have been learned by one or more children.

5. There is a commitment by staff to pupil learning and not just to teaching.

It should be obvious that teaching is a[illegible]re act, but learning is the product about which we are concerned.

We have established that the Right to Read does not mean that people have merely the right to be taught. It does mean that parents have the right to expect that their offspring will learn how to read.

The basis for the movement of children through a reading curriculum must be the rate at which they are able to learn rather than the rate at which the teachers are able to merely conduct the lessons. Adherence to this principle would improve the possibility of programing failure out of our schools. Inherent in this commitment is that of investing the time and effort that is required for <u>each</u> child to learn at the time the learning is proposed.

6. There is refined accommodation of the varying moments of readiness, varying rates of learning, and special needs and problems of all children.

Educators have long realized that differences exist among children of a comparable age and grade of such nature as to present very real implications for instruction. Children differ in terms of when they are ready or can be made ready to begin to learn how to read, they differ in terms of how long it takes to learn the numerous specifics of the reading curriculum, and they differ in terms of certain special needs and atypical problems that some children manifest. To translate this realization of the existence of individual differences into refined classroom, school building, and school district accommodation of these differences organizationally is, of course, a task that by and large remains to be undertaken. We have long said as educators that we believe in the existence of individual differences. It is perhaps then about time that we begin to display organizations which translate this belief into reality so that the child who requires twice as long to learn half as much is afforded the opportunity while the youngster who can learn twice as much in half the time is also truly provided for by the LEA.

7. There is accommodation of the Instructional Reading Level of all children.

It is generally acknowledged that the instructional vehicle should be appropriate to the sophistication of the learner. It is not very realistic to expect that children will acquire new and important learnings when the children do not have the prerequisite background. Conversely, it is not very productive to place children in material that they have already learned.

If the child is placed in a level of material that represents a great number of new learnings that are tightly compressed in that they are to be met over a short span of time, the child generally views the situation as hopeless and displays utter and complete frustration. If the child is placed in material that is too easy, the time of the child and the time and expense of the teacher is wasted. There must always be new learnings, but these learnings must be appropriate in terms of their number and in their spacing.

If children are always taught for mastery, they will always be at their Instructional Reading Level, that is, if the children have learned everything that has been taught up to a particular point, it should naturally follow that they would be ready for the next level of learnings that are proposed in the curriculum sequence.

8. The reading program recognizes and accommodates the implications that racial, cultural, and sexual differences may have in terms of curriculum, methodology, organization and administration, and materials.

Differences in race, culture, and sex may have little effect on what one must come to be able to do and know and feel in order to read independently. However, when reading the settings of the stories and the books, the appropriateness and the accuracy of the information that is conveyed or the story that is told, and the balance of focus on varying races, cultures, or sex roles in these stories and books must be a matter of concern.

9. There are curriculum adjustments in other subject areas for the children who are unable to cope with grade level reading matter.

Because reading is one of the tools crucial for success in other curricular areas where printed material is one of the chief sources of learning, concern must be shown for children without the requisite learning tools or skills.

The fourth grade child whose learning rate in reading is half that of the average youngster of the same age and grade and thus finds himself reading at a level below his grade level but who is thrust into reading matter in connection with the social studies, science, health, et cetera, on the basis of his grade in school will more than likely experience a hopeless sense of frustration and eventual failure. Honest accommodation can be made for these youngsters if the will is present.

10. There is ongoing in-service education for the total certificated teaching, supportive, and administrative staffs that is both intensive and extensive. Supportive staff is interpreted to include librarians, teachers of special subjects such as music and physical education, counselors, et cetera.

An essential component of both the national and state Right to Read effort is that of staff development or in-service education. It is critical that the teaching, supportive, and administrative staff of a local education agency come to truly know and understand their reading program. Included among these knowledges would be those of understanding 1) the rationale of the authors of the adopted reading curriculum, 2) the specifics which the adopted curriculum proposes for teaching, 3) the methodology recommended by the authors of the curriculum, and 4) the organizational patterns and the administrative procedures that have been defined by the LEA and which govern the conduct of the reading program.

Since understanding is essential, the in-service education must be intensive, and because of the broad scope of the in-service task, the course must be extensive. It is likely that an effective in-service education class in reading will be designed to consume between twenty-five to thirty contact hours. It is also believed that in order for staff development to be truly effective, it must be conducted by someone from within the local education agency; namely, the designated reading director.

11. There is a program of preparation in reading for all substitute teachers non-certificated staff who work in the classroom, such as teacher aides, parent volunteers, et cetera, and for the auxiliary personnel associated with the school.

Just as the teaching and administrative staffs must come to possess a very real understanding of the LEA's reading program so too must the substitute teachers and the non-certificated staff who assist in the classroom and work with pupils. A school year of only 180 days coupled with a school curriculum of mammoth proportions leads one to conclude that the regular teacher's absence from duty should not result in a marking of time during that period where a substitute teacher is present. To develop a cadre of substitute teachers who are almost as knowledgeable of the LEA's curriculum as is the regular classroom teacher is perhaps the most likely way to preclude this waste from occurring.

The non-certificated staff who assist teachers within the classroom and who work with pupils most assuredly must possess at least a general understanding of the LEA's curriculum and methods in order that the child's time be as productive as is possible.

Those auxiliary personnel associated with the school must receive the preparation that will allow them to perform their duties in the manner intended.

12. Opportunities are provided to junior and senior high school teachers in academic subject areas to develop the competencies which will allow them to accommodate the varying reading achievement levels of their students.

The fact that it may be expected that one-third to one-fourth of the pupil population are not to be expected to have mastered the total basal reading curriculum upon which true independence in reading is predicated by the time grade six is completed has very real implications for junior and senior high school teachers in those curricular areas where there is a heavy reliance upon the use of printed materials as sources of information.

It is for this reason that junior and senior high school teachers must be made sensitive to the problem that exists, knowledgeable as to adjustments that can and should be made in their instructional programs which will compensate for this low level of reading achievement manifested by a rather large number of the pupils at each age and grade level, and aware of the teaching practices in which they may engage so as to allow these students to better handle the print material that is put into their hands.

13. Each local education agency has a cadre of trained volunteer reading helpers.

There is much that can be done in terms of establishing classroom, school building, and school district organizational patterns that will enable the teachers to find the additional time in order to invest the effort that some children require in order to finally learn what it is that is being taught. It is a generally accepted fact that some children do require, for example, twice as long to learn one-half as much.

But there are limits as to what can be accomplished through more efficient organization insofar as accommodating learning rate and providing for the unique needs and atypical problems that some children manifest. Eventually, additional personnel will be needed because learning to read proceeds best with direct personal instruction. The reality of the situation is, however, that we do not have under the conventional system of school financing the salary dollars to buy the additional teacher contact time that some children need and deserve. A well-trained volunteer reading tutor working under the supervision of the teacher can create the needed time for some children. The same principle holds for adults learning to read.

14. There is an adult basic education component.

Nationally there are 3,000,000 Americans who are illiterate in that they can neither read nor write. There are in excess of twenty million Americans sixteen years of age and over who cannot read well enough to functionally survive in our society if one is willing to consider being able to read a newspaper, complete a job application, or respond to the written portion of a driver's examination as tasks upon which functional survival is based. There are 700,000 school dropouts each year, ninety per cent of whom are classified as slow or disabled readers. Today about one of every four American youngsters drop out of school somewhere between grade five and high school graduation.

It may be assumed that Minnesota must claim a share of the populations cited above for in 1960 of those Minnesotans twenty-five years of age and over, 74,000 had completed fewer than five years of schooling and 269,000 had completed fewer than eight grades of formal education. The 1970 census shows that 180,000 Minnesotans over the age of twenty-five have failed to complete eight grades of formal education.

It is unfortunate that a very small number of our over 400 public school districts offer the opportunity for the adult illiterate to learn how to read at public expense through the offering of adult basic education. The Adult Basic Education program must be publicized within the LEA and efforts should be made to locate, recruit, and encourage participants.

Quality developmental reading instruction must also be made available to those students who do not possess functional literacy yet desire to become enrolled in the state junior colleges and vocational technical schools.

15. There is defined curricular provision within the LEA for gifted and/or high achieving pupils.

Just as it is expected that one-third to one-fourth of the pupil population are not to be expected to have mastered the total basal reading curriculum upon which true independence in reading is predicated by the time grade six is completed, it is also known that one-third to one-fourth of the pupil population at each age and/or grade level have the capacity to master the total basal reading curriculum before the end of grade six if provided the opportunity. Unfortunately, in many LEAs these youngsters have a learning ceiling imposed upon them which essentially means that they are allowed to learn no more or any faster than those youngsters typically defined as average.

In some few LEAs where some curricular provision in the area of reading is made for the gifted and/or high achieving pupil, it is usually the result of the concern of an individual teacher rather than as a result of a concerted effort by the LEA.

The Junior Great Books program is one alternative to consider in programing for our rapid learners, and is illustrative of the kind of provision that can be made and must be made if the LEA is going to truly accommodate pupils at both ends of the ability continuum.

16. There is an articulated quality pre-school component that involves parents.

A quality pre-school component will have as a dimension a parent education program designed to help families turn their children's environments into learning experiences in ways that would address those language considerations upon which success in beginning reading is apparently predicated. The pre-school component must be articulated with the school's reading curriculum, that is, it must seek to prepare the youngster for what it is that the youngster will confront when he/she enters school and begins the task of learning how to read.

17. There exists readily available quality school and public library resources and services that are maximally utilized.

Children and adults must not only be taught how to read but they must be assured of the opportunity to use reading as a means of securing knowledge and enjoyment. Certainly the greatest repository of the printed and non-printed materials that can be used for either or both of these twin purposes by our youth and adults is the library.

In order that children may read and learn to love to read, each elementary school should provide a quality media center that is operated on an open basis in order that pupils may have easy access to the holdings. The media center must be staffed by the type of professional and supportive personnel who are adept at nurturing within children a love of reading as well as assisting them in the location and use of materials from within the resources of the media center.

The Minnesota Long Range Plan for Library Service must come to fruition in order that public library services may become equally available to all Minnesota citizens.

18. Provision has been made within the local education agency to produce quality instructional and practice materials for distribution to the teachers of reading. Materials that allow pupils to work independently and that articulate with the defined curriculum of the LEA are desirable.

When teachers group for instruction in order to accommodate the differences that exist among children that have application for instruction, they are creating difficulties for themselves. Many of these difficulties relate to the fact that the children in one or more instructional groups must be working independently while the teacher is directly engaged with the youngsters of another group. The pupils who are working independently for an extended period of time need tasks that are meaningfully related to reading, can be undertaken with only minimal teacher direction, and that require their extended attention. Generally, practice materials of this nature that articulate with the foundation curriculum are unavailable from commercial sources. The need is great, but the time that would be required for each teacher to generate her own supply would be excessive. It is for that reason that an LEA must address itself to the resolution of the problem if they truly expect that their teaching staff will be able to group for instruction in reading.

Also, the foundation curriculum is often unable to supply all the instructional lessons on a particular instructional objective that may be required in order for some children to come to finally learn. These kinds of articulated instructional materials, as contrasted with practice materials, must also be generated, and it is far more efficiently done by the LEA than to expect that each teacher will develop her own.

19. Junior and senior high school teachers of reading have a demonstrated knowledge of developmental reading as it relates to their local education agency's curriculum.

A developmental reading curriculum typically identifies all of the learnings deemed necessary for youngsters to come to possess in order to be able to read independently. Such learnings represent a volume deemed appropriate for children of average ability making average progress to master concurrent with the completion of grade six. This of course means that the one-third to one-fourth of our pupil population who are less than average in terms of when they were ready or could be made ready to begin to learn how to read and in terms of the rate at which they were able to continue to learn after once becoming ready could not be expected to have mastered the total reading curriculum concurrent with their completion of grade six. More time and instruction is obviously required in order for these youngsters to master the total curriculum upon which true independence in reading is apparently predicated.

It is at the secondary school level that a continuation of instruction in developmental reading must be provided for those youngsters who have not mastered all of the requisite learnings by the time they have completed the elementary school. The distinction must be made between the learning requirements of those post elementary students who have all of the requisite skills and need only to refine those skills and to learn to apply them to the reading material that is put into their hands in connection with their academic work, and the needs of those youngsters who have not yet acquired all of the requisite basic learnings.

The question as to how both of these categories of students are to be best accommodated, and who it is that is to provide the instruction, must be addressed by the LEA. It is certainly recommended that the LEA have on its staff at the post elementary level enough personnel with the competencies and time required to help those youngsters gain the full independence they may yet lack. Also, the total post elementary school teaching staff must be in possession of the knowledge that will allow them to assist those youngsters with the requisite skills read more efficiently in the various academic subject areas.

24. Each local education agency has developed a reporting system for reading development that fully, accurately, and specifically documents a child's learning and provides such information to the parents.

The Right to Read does not mean the right merely to be taught but the right to learn how to read. A citizen is able to exercise a right only when he has obtained whatever the right is designed to guarantee. This definition of the right to read as that of coming to be able to demonstrate the ability to read has significant implications regarding our concept of learning aptitude. More and more educators and psychologists argue very vehemently and persuasively that aptitude is not a measure of whether or not a child may learn or even how much, but rather, a measure of the amount of time that a learner requires to attain full mastery of a learning task. This definition sets as a goal for the end of an educational cycle not merely the fair grading of the class, but each pupil's mastery of the skills. This new definition of aptitude points out that apart from a very small percentage of children, every pupil can earn a grade of "A" if "A" is your index of mastery. By considering the time that it takes for a child to learn as the variable in the instructional process rather than varying levels of achievement from zero to near perfect, it is thought possible for nearly every child to achieve mastery.

Obviously some pupils can master a skill such as reading more quickly than others, and some will be quite slow, but if the organization of the curriculum can accommodate these differences, nearly every child can learn to read or calculate or to master any of the other skills essential to a productive life in our society. And when he does master it he deserves an "A".

Some educators believe that since learning or mastery is the ultimate goal, the letter grade system of A, B, C, D, and E, which reflects the old assumptions of varying levels of achievement, is incompatible and obsolete. What is favored in its place is a reporting system that identifies specifically what it is that has been taught to each pupil over the course of a reporting period, whether the individual has learned, and if he has not yet learned, what it is that will be done about it.

22. Each local education agency has identified someone within the LEA who has the authority, responsibility, and time for the development and maintenance of a quality reading program.

The Minnesota Right to Read plan has two basic dimensions. One dimension is that of the State of Minnesota making direct technical assistance available to each public school district and to each private and parochial school administrative unit for a sustained period of time in order that a total reading program may be built which will meet certain generally accepted criteria of excellence.

The second dimension is that of encouraging the identification of an individual within each public school district and each private and parochial school administrative unit who will be designated by the local board of education as the director of reading for the district or school administrative unit.

The latter dimension is thus calling for the creation of a position to be known as "reading director" with individuals being prepared, but not certificated, by the State of Minnesota through the Right to Read staff to assume these positions.

In order for a person to function effectively in a leadership position such as that of reading director, there must not only be an assignment of responsibility but an accompanying amount of authority and time.

23. The local education agency annually has available the achievement levels of their pupils in reading by grade and/or age level.

Assuming that the basic mission of the school is to ensure that learning has been accomplished, the output of the school must no longer be defined in terms of teaching done, but as learning proven. If we are willing to accept the premise that the patrons of the school and/or their elected representatives have the right to know the educational results that are produced for their expenditures in terms of output-learning, and if it is agreed that pupils' learning growth or achievement in reading is measurable and reportable, the LEA is responsible for annually assessing the growth of their charges in reading using the most valid measure available. An effort should be made to honestly report and publish the data and conclusions inferred, and to assist the public in the interpretation of the results according to district policy.

20. The board of education of the local education agency has established an incentive program for teacher in-service education in reading.

There are several options available to boards of education as they seek to establish incentives which may be offered to staff members to encourage particpation in in-service education programs. One alternative would be to recognize in-service credits which would apply to a change of salary schedule lanes. A second possibility would be the practice of paying a stipend to staff members who enrol in and complete in-service education courses which carry no academic credit. Another option would be to effect a cooperative agreement with institutions of higher learning so that academic credits can be earned for the in-service courses designed to focus on the local reading program. There will certainly be other incentives which may be identified by the local education agency.

21. Each local education agency defines their reading curriculum and makes the information available to the public.

Accepting the time-honored definition of curriculum as consisting of those educational experiences for which the school accepts the responsibility of providing to its charges, it follows that a reading curriculum consists of all those learnings that the school has identified as crucial for children to come to possess in order to be able to read independently.

If curriculum is as vital as is inferred, it would follow that a LEA should be able to identify its curriculum when the question is asked by parents, "What specifically do you teach children in the area of reading?"